July 26, 2013

TO: Academic Deans
    Department Chairs and Program Directors
    CCAS, CPS, ESIA, GSEHD, GWSB, LAW, SEAS, SMHS, SON, SPHHS

FR: Forrest Maltzman
    Senior Vice Provost, Academic Affairs and Planning
    Professor, Department of Political Science

RE: Graduate Students in Instructional, Research Support, Independent Research and Administrative Roles

Attached you will find a new description of four categories that we will utilize to fund graduate assistants and graduate fellows. This memo supersedes the Vice President for Academic Affairs’ November 2006 memo on Graduate Students in Instructional Roles and updates materials provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research in April 2013. This new memo and its companion chart clarify existing distinctions of instructional, administrative and research roles of graduate students. It also contains links to detailed information on processes, model letters and forms. The new categories outlined in the memo will go into effect 1 July 2013 for research awards and in the 2013-14 academic year for University awards. Needless to say, this is a significant change in processes and it will take us a little time to iron out the kinks. But, Steve, Leo, and I are convinced we are on the right track.

The purpose of the new categories is to simultaneously reduce the number of categories and to provide faculty the flexibility they need to support our students. The categories are also a recognition that to enable select GW doctoral students to pursue academic careers, it is increasingly important that we provide them with a progressive set of faculty-related experiences -- teaching, research and administrative -- related to their academic areas. Because we realize that these areas are often intertwined, we have revised our graduate assistance categories to two: Graduate Assistant (GA) and Graduate Research Assistant (GRA). The categories that we were using previously were not designed to support students who are simultaneously working with the faculty they are assisting.

Both the GA and GRA positions will now be managed through the Graduate Student Assistantship and Fellowship Office, and OVPR will have a significant role in assisting faculty with obtaining externally-funded GRA positions. Human Resources will no longer be involved in the hiring of graduate research assistants. The new categories were developed in consultation with a number of principal investigators, Deans, Department Chairs, the Office of General Counsel, and the Office of the Vice President for Research. I really appreciate your help in designing and implementing this.
The **Graduate Assistant (GA)** awards will be primarily teaching assistant awards but GAs will also be allowed to conduct research, as long as assisting on a particular research project is not their primary function, or perform administrative duties related to the student’s program of study. Because teaching at some level should be a part of all doctoral students training, all GAs will be required to complete the GTA Program in their first semester of appointment. We have then combined the former Graduate Teaching and Administrative categories into one: GA. Students who were formally serving as an Instructional Assistant will also be classified as Graduate Assistants. Any graduate student performing teaching assistance must be appointed as a GA. The former Instructional Assistant (IA) category is now restricted to non-students only and if the person is a GW employee, the employee cannot be in a non-exempt position.

Graduate Assistants would receive graduate salaries for their services and may, but will not necessarily, be awarded a tuition, living allowance (aka stipend), housing and/or health insurance subsidy fellowship.

The **Graduate Research Assistant (GRA)** awards may be funded either internally or externally. Students in a GRA position are primarily responsible for helping a PI on a research project designed to create generalizable knowledge. The GRA category will be a non-benefited, student position. GRAs may not be a regular part-time or full-time employee of the university. OVPR staff can assist faculty applying for grants with determining whether a student on the project could be classified as a GA or GRA.

It is our expectation that graduate students who are GAs or GRAs in CCAS, CPS, ESIA, GSEHD, SB, SEAS and SON who are receiving a minimum combination of stipend fellowship and graduate salary or graduate salary alone of $20,000 (doctoral) or $16,000 (master’s) will also receive a health insurance fellowship if enrolled for the year in the GW Student Health plan. The awarding of such fellowships is essential for the creation of competitive packages that attract the best students. For 2013-14, the health insurance subsidy fellowship, funded by the Office of Graduate Student Assistantships and Fellowships, is $1,500 for the calendar year.

A question has come up about summer salaries for GRAs. If a GRA is being employed for the summer, the PI should work with sponsored research on identifying how many weeks and how many hours a week they would like to incorporate into their grant. One does not need to employ a student for the entire summer or even a full month.

A new requirement for all GAs and GRAs hired in these positions for the first time at GW is a limited background check, a criminal background check and a check of the sex offender database. GAs and GRAs may begin work before the checks are complete, but it is best to have these done well in advance of the students first day of work if at all possible. Background checks will be handled centrally.
In addition to the Graduate Assistant and Graduate Research Assistant categories, students may be appointed as either Fellows or Research Fellows. The attached memo describes the distinction between these categories.

GAships, GRAships and Fellowships are all academic awards intended to attract top graduate students to GW to support our research and teaching efforts and to enhance scholarship within our academic programs.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Geri Rypkema (rypkema@gwu.edu), 4-6822.